Memory and Desire: Narratives of Pre-1989 Migrants from Hungary and Bulgaria

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MEMORY AND DESIRE

Narratives of Pre-1989 Migrants from Hungary and Bulgaria

"There were things which made us feel happy, but when you compare them to what you saw afterwards, you arrive at a conclusion which is far from satisfactory."
(Marina)[1]

Introduction

The standard social history of Hungary defines the "typical migrant of 1956" as "younger than 25 years, male, a student at the university or a skilled worker".[2] If that is the case, there is no space for female migrants in this story. To make the picture even more muddled, in 1956 the 175,082 Hungarians who left the country did so without any documented or recorded trace in social science research.[3] As in the case of the 1956 emigrants, it is even less likely that we find any trace of women whose departure from Bulgaria and Hungary before 1989 was for political reasons.[4] This invisibility is due to the absence of gender-sensitive data, and to the general assumption that agents of migration studies are men: men decided they were going to emigrate. Women are discussed only in the context of trafficking, that is, in the context of forced migration.[5]

As far as political migrants are concerned, migration studies focus on "leading" politicians who emigrated because of the communist rule, and with very few exceptions these remarkable personalities were all men. Right after 1945, during the first wave of political emigration, we find women among the emi-

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1 All names used in the text for the interviewed persons are pseudonyms. Marina is a pre-1989 Bulgarian migrant to the Netherlands.

2 *Valuch,* Tibor: Magyarország társadalomtörténete a XX. század második felében [The Social History of Hungary in the 20th Century]. Budapest 2001, 49 (Osiris tankönyvek).

3 *Gyáni,* Gábor: Az 56-os menekülök emlékezet stratégiái [Memory Strategies of 1956 Migrants]. In: *Kanyó,* Tamás (Ed.): Emigráció és identitás. 56-os magyar menekültek Svájcban [Emigration and Identity. 56 Emigrants in Switzerland]. Budapest 2002, 135-149, here 136 (A múlt ösvényén).

4 See *Kovács,* Éva: A magyar emigráció kutatásának lehetöségei [Possibilities to Research Hungarian Migration]. In: *Gyarmati,* György (Ed.): Az átmenet évkönyve. Trezor 3. Az Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltárának Évkönyve. [Yearbook of Transition. Yearbook of the Historical Archive of the State Security Services]. Budapest 2004, 189–199.

5 See on this *Pető,* Andrea: Lehetőség, akarat és döntés. Az 1989 elötti magyar nöi migránsok elbeszélései. [Possibility, Decision and Will. Narratives of pre-1989 Female Migrants]. In: Egyenlítö 3 (2005), 51-58.

grants, but as time passed and as migrants from communist Hungary and Bulgaria found less and less political space for their work, these women also disappeared from the canonised memory of migration. This gender-blind characteristic of women's migration causes serious theoretical problems, which fit into the aim of our project[6] to investigate subjectivity. Based on the life story interviews, we have investigated how women as migrants make decisions regarding their own lives, and in using this knowledge we are trying to reformulate the relationship between women and migration studies as far as pre-1989 migrants are concerned.

The question for this paper is whether there are gendered patterns of political migration. What were the expectations of women related to emigration before 1989? How were the gendered expectations realised in the "lands of freedom": in the Netherlands by the deeply religious Protestant migrant women, and in Italy? How can we compare that experience with the experiences of post-1989 migrants? The answers are connected to the introductory quotation: how did the pre-1989 migrants understand and narrate their critical points towards the "West," as well as their disappointment. In a broader sense, this paper explores a chapter of the history of emotion as far as migration is concerned.

The sample

One hundred women were interviewed: 25 women from Hungary and 25 from Bulgaria who left after 1989 and stayed in their new countries, as well as 25 from each nationality who returned to their respective country of origin. Out of 50 interviews per country, five from each were with pre-1989 migrants, for a total of ten interviews. 20 women from Italy and the Netherlands each, who through various methods made contact with and hosted Hungarian and Bulgarian emigrant women, were also interviewed. Native speakers conducted the interviews in the native languages, usually in the places where the interviewees lived. We transcribed the interviews and translated them into English.[7]

In selecting our sample, we relied heavily on the cultural institutes and the churches visited by the Hungarian and Bulgarian migrants. The network of Protestant pastors in the Netherlands was especially useful, as well as international babysitting agencies in Italy. We used the snowball interview sampling method.[8]

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6 The EU 5th Framework Project HPSE-CT2001-00087 "Gender Relationships in Europe at the Turn of the Millennium: Women as Subjects in Migration and Marriage (2001-2004)" was based at the European University Institute, Florence, Italy and it was headed by Luisa Passerini.

7 Other results of the project will be published as "Women from East to West" by Berghahn Press in 2007.

8 Special thanks to László Csorba and András Gergely.

The pre-1989 migrants are divided into groups depending on the time of migration and motivation to migrate.[9] The group not represented in the sample is that of extreme right-wing politicians and sympathisers, who considered the Soviet occupation a threat. They left up until 1945. The first group in the sample consists of those women who left their country right after WWII. Those still alive are few in number by now, but they constitute a different category since they refer directly to WWII and to the communist takeover as an important change in their lives, and as a factor which mobilised them. They left the country until 1947, because of the communist takeover. In Bulgaria in 1947 there was a massive wave of emigration mostly due to nationalisation. The Jews living in Hungary and Bulgaria who opted for migration to Israel, the *alia* due to the revival of anti-Semitism after WWII constitute a different case study, but they were present both in Hungary and in Bulgaria.

The second group is made up of Hungarian women who emigrated in 1956.[10] This group consisted of mostly young and/or educated women. The narrative of '56 is very different. Some considered 1956 primarily as an opportunity for leaving the country. This sense of opportunity was very often combined with the imperative of life-saving if the husband or the wife had a previous record of anticommunist activity.

The year 1956 also plays a role in setting up patterns of symbolic communication: the institutionalisation of Hungarian migrant life received a new push after 1956. The Hungarian migration of 1956 was the most "successful" migration as far as the social success and level of integration into the host community is concerned, due to the social composition of the migrants. Also for the new migrants who left Hungary after 1989, an important point of reference was the experience and model of living of the "old emigrants". The associations and cultural life of the 1956 migrants in the Netherlands fostered an emotional, "imagined" bond to the homeland. New immigrants after 1989 may have never lost this bond at all, unlike the 1956 immigrants.

We got dressed up and thought how nice it would be to meet Hungarians! It was the largest disappointment of my life here! Because this is the club of the Hungarians of the 1956 emigration. How shall I put it? They were an average of 30-40 years older than me. The second generation does not speak Hungarian. It was full of so-called Hungarians who only spoke Dutch. And I did not speak a word of Dutch. There was a popular music band from somewhere around Hatvan.[11] Great Hungarianness was manifested when someone recited "Szózat" [a patriotic poem – AP], I think, since it was a 15 March ball.[12] The "Szózat" was recited but it was a horrible interpretation. The national anthem was also recited but then I

9 On the different waves of Hungarian emigration see *Nagy*, Kázmér: Elveszett alkotmány [Lost Constitution]. München 1974. — *Borbándi*, Gyula: Emigráció és Magyarország. Nyugati magyarok a változások éveiben. 1985-1995 [Emigration and Hungary: Hungarians in the West during the Time of Change]. Basel, Budapest 1996.

10 For more on this see *Pető*, Andrea: A Missing Piece? How Women in the Communist Nomenclatura are not Remembering. In: East European Politics and Society 16/8 (2002) 948-957.

11 Small town in Hungary. Footnote from the interview.

12 National holiday in Hungary, commemorating the 1848 patriotic revolution against the Habsburgs which started on 15 March. Footnote from the interview.

was crying so much that I could hardly stay on my two feet. And then it consisted of Hungarian pálinka (brandy) and Hungarian sausages and everybody got drunk by midnight and they were singing "Akácos út"[13] and who knows what. But I felt that we had absolutely nothing in common.

(Teri)[14]

Women migrated through marriage or adventurous escape. Migrating from the communist countries could only occur via these two channels. Families of deep religious beliefs used marriage as a strategy. The integration into the host culture was narrated more easily if the husband was of the hosting nation. The network of Dutch Protestant pastors played an important role in helping migration through matchmaking with communist Hungary.

In Bulgaria and in Hungary between 1956 and 1989, emigration was treated as treason, and unsuccessful attempts to cross the border were punished severely. A possible and legal method of emigration for women was marriage with a foreigner. In our sample, there are several of these women, who discussed the legal and bureaucratic obstacles they faced while arranging their marriages in Bulgaria.

As far as the reception of the pre-1989 migrants is concerned, the host interviews made it clear that the pre-1989 migrants represent a different type of migration pattern compared to the one of post-1989 migrants. Dutch and Italian women were interviewed as hosts. In their interviews, women like Italian host Silvia emphasized that the pre-1989 migrants were viewed as "more educated". They narrated that these pre-1989 migrants left for political reasons, unlike the present migrants whose only aim is simply to live better.

Yes, I think mostly higher educated. Of course, a lot came in '56 and in '68, and they were, I think, intellectual, elite people and also Polish women came who felt under pressure in the '80s there, well, they must have been very brave people and... Yes, I think that you need a lot of spunk to succeed here, so I really respect them... I think that those people who have come here often have done well in their studies. A lot of people I hear of do things in music or have... well... all kind of built up really nice or have really good positions here.

(Anette)[15]

Interview analysis: pre-1989 Migrants

There are three elements which construct a migrant: potential, desire and the decision to emigrate.

The young have more potential to emigrate because of their free-floating social status. For young women who are under reproductive pressure, the case is different, so women with young children are less mobile than single women. That is why the latter are included in the sample.

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13 "Road lined with Acacia trees" is a melancholic popular Hungarian song usually sung with a band of Gypsies by older generations (usually drunk in the wee hours of the morning after partying). Footnote from the interview.

14 Teri is a Hungarian language teacher who left for the Netherlands in 1998.

15 Dutch host Anette is a university lecturer of Slavic languages in the Netherlands.

As far as the desire is concerned, during the Cold War there were two main reasons which motivated migration: escape from material deprivation, and escape from political and/or religious persecution.

The political narrative overshadows the economic one as the "master frame" of narration. The general fear and distrust of economic migrants, except for the one successful period of 1956 for the Hungarians, forced the migrants to use rather the "political frame" for narration, referring to the communist persecution in a general stereotypical way.

Hungary and Bulgaria belonged to the Soviet Bloc. We might assume that those who left these countries did so because of their dissatisfaction with the political situation there. These countries were countries of "statist feminism", where authoritarian political practice was combined with top-down state emancipation efforts. Those women who left are critical of these developments, especially of the forced emancipation. If it is true that conservative woman are "relative creatures",[16] then who made the decisions, and after what kind of consideration, to emigrate? Answering these questions will shed light on female relational identity, in relation to the dominant male political culture and the structure of remembering.

Analysing the interviews with pre-1989 migrants, we see that they experienced the statist feminism of their home country and they experienced equality defined at the workplace. Statist feminism defined the "cultural repertoires"[17] of the migrants, which were very different from the host country. For political migrants, statist feminism was oppressive or expected to be oppressive; on the other hand, the world they found on the other side of the Iron Curtain was not their dreamland. In that sense, it was more "difficult" to be a female migrant than a male migrant. The women who left Hungary and Bulgaria before 1989 experienced a different level of gender equality in workplace and in everyday life than the host women. On the other hand, when they were asked to give stories about their life in their homeland, they were expected to say nothing positive, because that related to the communist political system. In that sense, while men experienced discrimination due to class and ethnicity, women, in addition to those factors, also experienced discrimination because of their gender.

If we compare the situation of pre- and post-1989 female migrants, we find a serious difference. For the post-1989 migrants, the gap between institutionalised welfare systems in their homeland and in their host country was not that big: by the mid 1990s, on the one hand the state socialist welfare system had collapsed in their home countries, and on the other hand due to pressure coming from the new social movements, a kind of support network had been built up in the Netherlands.

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16 Quoted in *Yalom,* Marilyn: Biography as Autobiography. Adele Hugo. Witness of Her Husband's Life. In: *Bell,* Susan G. / *Robinson,* Lillian S. / *Yalom,* Marilyn (Eds.): Revealing Lives. Autobiography, Biography and Gender. New York 1990, 53-65, hete 53 (SUNY Series in Feminist Criticism and Theory).

17 *Lamont,* Michèle / *Thévenot,* Laurent: Introduction: toward a renewed comprative cultural sociology. In: *Dies.* (Eds.): Rethinking Comparative Cultural Sociology. Repertoires of Evaluation in France and the United States. Cambridge 2000, 1-22, hier 8-10.

The gender script of migration is also interesting in another framework: the framework of resistance to communism. During communism, the stereotypical woman's characteristics were intimacy, sensitivity, and family centeredness, performed as a resistance to statist feminism, because these characteristics were relativized by the rhetoric of statist feminism.[18] Private resistance to communism was based on restoring the so-called "female virtues" in family, based on the cult of Virgin Mary, which aims to preserve family values in private life against the pseudo-equality of state socialism. The paradox – how a woman might be active in public when the conservative discourse expects her to stay passive – was solved with the post-1990 revival of the cult of Virgin Mary as a cult of normative motherhood.[19] The centrality of "family" in the conservative discourse should be the starting point of the analysis. The conservative discourse of "family" is characterised by the clear division between public space, which is for men, and private space, which is exclusively for women and for the "family". However, participation in and the memory of revolutions as well as migration might blur these distinctions, and might lead to a redefinition of hierarchies. Migrant women leave their families and elderly parents behind, an action very alien to conservative thinking, so they are forced to construct a family in their new homeland in order to build new emotional ties and to decrease their guilt. As Magda, one of the Hungarian women who immigrated to the Netherlands said: "I thought if I went to America, then who knows if I will ever see my parents again."

In the case of migration, the question is what happens if the points of reference, boundaries are challenged by the new environment. The pre-1989 migrant women came from a "statist feminist" environment, and they arrived in a seriously patriarchal environment. In Italy and in the Netherlands before the second wave of feminism, these migrants had to face discrimination as migrants and as women.

In the case of the interviews with Bulgarians who left before 1989, it is very difficult to divide the different arguments for migration. The "cultural migrant" as a concept and as an explanation for migration is a very present narrative frame, such as in the case of a young Bulgarian student who migrated to Italy after 1991:

> So I thought that people here must be very different from outs, and the culture is on a higher level... This was my main point [to migrate – AP], not the economic reason.
>
> (Penka)[20]

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18 On this see *Pető*, Andrea (Ed.): "As He Saw Her". Gender Politics in Secret Party Reports in Hungary during the 1950s. In: *Idem:* Women in History – Women's History. Budapest 1994, 107-121 (Central European University / History Department. Working Paper Series 1).

19 *Pető*, Andrea: Conservative and Extreme Right Wing Women in Contemporary Hungary. An Ideology Transition. In: *Knežević*, Đurđa: Women and Politics. Women in History – History without Women. Zagreb 2001, 265-277.

20 Penka is a Bulgarian university student in Italy.

The question which cannot be answered using only statistical data is this: who makes the decision to emigrate? This is a legitimate question especially when the consequences of the decision include risk of illegal border-crossing and the finality that there is no way back. As a Bulgarian migrant to Italy said:

I do not know how I was allowed to go out of the country, because it was the era of the absolute communism… As a matter of fact, almost everybody [who left the country – AP] is called a criminal in Bulgaria. I was even called a traitor to the fatherland after I came back from prison.

(Penka)

In the interviews, the retroactive justification and also the desire to control their own lives through the narrative of the text are present. The desire to match the coherent societal system of perception is always visible. The adaptation to the host community is presented in a rational framework: if somebody wants it, it can be done (referring to the individual and individualistic decision making).

The very special composition of 1956 migrants from Hungary, who were mostly skilled workers and youngsters with university degrees, made that adaptation a success story if we are measuring it by the degree of acculturation. Integration is often presented as a one-sided process, which "only" depends on the newcomer, and of course on his or her level of "culture". This can be seen in the case of Emilia, who is a mathematician and got married before 1989 to a Dutchman. "I do not have any problems with integration," she says while expressing her belief that intellectuals could integrate as well as university students. According to this view if there is a problem with integration, that is the problem of "the others", as Emilia said:

I think that the Hungarian community or the Hungarians who got here, they are perfectly, fully well integrated in the Dutch society.

(Emilia)

I was brought up in a Protestant family. My husband also. Common principles were present in both families. Well, Dutch habits do not always correspond to Hungarian habits, but while one is still young it is easy to adapt. If one wants. Not everybody has success. I know because I met a lot of divorced Hungarian women, who came here to marry Dutchman, but they were unable to acclimate, or I do not know what their problem was. For us the principle was if one wants something, they will succeed. If two people want to stay together, no matter the differences, it can happen too.

(Rózsika)[21]

In the case of Bulgaria, the decision needed even greater courage. But the narrative of the migrants who emigrated is on a very general level which hides the possible individual features.

Bulgarians have always been under very strict control; [in Bulgaria during communism – AP] no one could afford to greet somebody, or buy something without special permission… even the smallest thing…

(Eva)[22]

21 Rózsika got married to a Dutch Protestant pastor in 1968.

22 Eva is a Bulgarian living in the Netherlands.

The only thing that... because there I had been tormented a lot in a connection with... these friends that I had there... no I did not have any work, I was not allowed to work. That is why. I told myself, pull yourself together... and I started. The third attempt [to restart her life – AP] should work out.

(Mira)[23]

Migrant narratives: non-referential stories in a referential world

The stories of migrants are constructed in an uncertain, cross-cultural context. The cultural repertoires used in the interviews are different, and the references to presumed common meanings and knowledge are *ad hoc*. Migrant women's remembering of communism takes a mythical route, producing a more-or-less similar but coherent self-presentation. According to Roland Barthes, text of each story is a self-contained security system, and it gives illusionary or imagined control to the narrator over the production of her life.[24] Defining autobiographical remembrance as "an improvisational activity that forms emergent selves which gives us a sense of needed comfort and a culturally valued sense of personal coherence over time"[25] was challenged by traumatic events of the 20th century, especially by the Shoah, which made the "metaphoric mappings" impossible as Barclay pointed out.

The methodological problem of the migrant's remembering of politics is the non-referential character of their stories. The two main sources of knowledge are education and experience. In the case of migrant women, the educational system served the "forced forgetting" of the communist regime, while experiences were transmitted and constructed in the family. In the migrant's situation, the educational system transmitted a different culture and value system and their family became a nuclear family. They lost communication with their homelands, and with relatives and friends for decades. The only form of communication was the self-censored correspondence, written with the definite knowledge that it would be read not only by the addressee. The letters kept the self-censored connection with homeland. As Rózsa, who left for Italy in 1959, said: "We have not written that which was not allowed."

They also lost their own language as an essential instrument of communication. Arriving in a new environment, the key question is command of the language. But language skills are not only cognitive but also psychological. Accents mark the newcomer, and she believes herself to be marked by it.

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23 Mira is a Bulgarian is a ballerina dancer, who married an Italian in 1998.

24 Quoted in *Denzin*, K. Norman: Harold and Agnes. A Feminist Narrative Undoing. In: Sociological Theory 8/2 (1990) 198-216, here 213.

25 *Barclay*, Craig R.: Autobiographical Remembering. Narrative Constraints on Objectified Selves. In: *Rubin*, David C. (Ed.): Remembering Our Past. Studies in Autobiographical Memory. Cambridge 1996, 94–125, here 95.

When I went home I did not speak Hungarian. I understood what my friends, girlfriends said, but it took a week until I, myself, was able to speak.

(Magda)[26]

If we are in a circle of Hungarians we are Hungarians, when among Dutch we are Dutch. There is no need to mention that. OK. My husband speaks perfectly; he learned really well. Lots of Hungarians, I am telling you honestly, [if you are listening to them – AP] it is obvious that they are Hungarians. But really, you can tell.

(Ella)[27]

If someone wants to keep the language, it depends only on their will.

(Rozika)[28]

We went to England, because we thought we spoke English.

(Rózsa)[29]

That is another new psychological block – speaking German.

(Edit)[30]

The relationship between different generations of migrants is also problematic and strengthens the atomised character of remembering. The visits of post-1989 migrants (Magda, Teri) to the cultural circle of Hungarian migrants in the Netherlands to celebrate 23 October made them aware of their differences from, rather than similarities to, the Hungarians living in the Netherlands from 1956 onwards. These societies were formed in order to construct a buffer zone between the migrants and the host community, and to channel the frustration and dissatisfaction experienced in the migrant position. The meetings represent the "nearly real" world of the lost homeland.

In 1995, on the 23rd of October and I must say again how surprised I was because of that. The Dutch burst into tears and so did the Hungarians, and I just sat there like... good Lord! What am I doing here? What's all this about? Fairly obviously, I wasn't born yet in 1956. Sure, one hears all the stories and everything. There was one huge difference between us, though, at least what I had heard earlier and what I was presented here. Thus my parents stayed in Hungary after 1956. They spent all those years in Hungary and tried to stay alive, tried to work which was no joke. For those who came here in 1956, they had had to leave their country and it must have been terrible for them, yes. They had to stay alive to see this [the collapse of communism – AP]. What am I to say about it? I just saw the other side of the thing [the Iron Curtain – AP]. I saw the very part my parents had to go through at home.

(Magda)

The communist states used the fragmentation of memory of WWII. This Manichaean struggle for power ("antifascist communists against fascist reactionaries") denied millions the right to mourn and ranked personal losses ac-

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26 Magda was hired by a Dutch youth camp in 1995. She married and after the completion of her medical doctorate she has been working as a medical doctor in the Netherlands.

27 Ella left for the Netherlands before 1989.

28 Rozika has lived in the Netherlands since 1997, is married to a Dutchman, and is running an enterprise in Hungary.

29 Rózsa left Hungary in 1956 with her Hungarian husband for England first, but is presently living in Italy.

30 Edit was born in Hungary, and moved from Israel to Italy in 1954. She is working as a freelance writer, and her husband is Italian.

cording to political needs.[31] The public space was dominated by the binary opposition: those who were the supporters, and those who were enemies of the regime.

As Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan have pointed out, "collective memory is not what everybody thinks"[32] but can belong to smaller communities, can be produced, cultivated and constructed on the level of families or smaller communities. In the case of the political migrants, it is their group of fellow migrants which serves as a site of fostering "collective memory". Stories they had heard about their life in communist Hungary were non-stories, stories which do not exist in the official discourse in Hungary and also outside Hungary, because no language skills or referential social context was available. That is the reason that complaint is used as communication.

The oppressed social group created a victimised language, a counter-discourse that made their stories "improvisable". I would argue that the way stories are told is based on the cultural *repertoire*. The "master frame" of victimhood constructs the possibility for any improvisation. That is the way to explain the presence of stories about communist oppression in the stories of women who personally had not experienced the communist oppression. It is the frame they have been very comfortably using since 1989.

Although there were several traumatic events in the life stories of the women, the narration went smoothly without any difficulties. This language of the "communist crimes," used by the first group of women, became a minority discourse; it was developed against the majority oppression and offers points of identification for the participants.[33] 1989 offered an opportunity frame since this became one of several possible discourses, and after 1998, the dominant right-wing discourse about post-1945 Hungarian history. The narratives present a coherent political self, based on different forms of resistance to communism. Remembering was mostly bound to narrated emotions, not to events or to actions. Women did not tell events but described emotions related to events lived or experienced by others. This experiencing was then related to other family members.

> It was a horrible situation. I have single pictures about this. For a long time I had psychological blockage. I could not remember anything.
>
> (Edit)

The event, the action remembered shaped the collective memory and in some cases even legitimised new political structures. During the communist period, the past was distorted to legitimise communist rule, and history was narrowed

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31 For more on this see *Pető*, Andrea: Memory Unchanged. Redefinition of Identities in Post WWII Hungary. In: CEU History Department Yearbook 1997-98. Budapest 1999, 135-153.

32 *Winter*, Jay / *Sivan*, Emmanuel (Eds.): War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century. Cambridge 2000, 9 (Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare 5).

33 *Seidel*, Gill: Right-Wing Discourse and Power. Exclusion and Resistance. In: *Idem* (Ed.): The Nature of the Right. A Feminist Analysis of Order Patterns. Amsterdam 1988, 7-17 (Critical Theory 6).

down to an enforced forgetting. After 1989, private knowledge and private histories were used to challenge official representations in different oral history collections. So it is crucial to understand the "metaphoric mapping," how these private memories were constructed, and what meanings were given to the event. In the case of post-1989 migrants, the memory of communism is narrated through personal and/or professional persecution. Kristina, a migrant from Bulgaria, took pity on her father, who had always been dreaming about travelling. Marina spoke about not having a job in communist times just like Nona.

Well, you see, my father always dreamed of travelling to foreign countries. But he never had a chance because during the communist regime, he wasn't allowed to do that. So he passed away without realising his dream to visit all those countries which I managed to visit.

(Marina)[34]

We went there and after that... after three months, we had to go back, because our tourist visas were for three months. But we preferred to stay, because the conditions here [in Bulgaria – AP] in the communist time were not perfect for having a job...

(Nona)[35]

Memory of WWII

The political standpoint of women can be identified by analysing their position in relation to WWII. The first group of women in the sample share the same traumatic events in the lives of their families, but these events were attached to the communist takeover in 1945/1947/1948/1949. Their fathers and grandfathers were prominent soldiers, policemen, judges or they had properties (ranging from one tiny shoe shop to big estates to factories) which were nationalised. In Bulgaria, they fought on the extreme right (as in the case of Kristina). For women in this group, WWII started with the Soviet occupation of Hungary. They were not concerned with the war crimes and genocide committed by Hungarians before the Soviet occupation. Their families were victims of forced migration, their property was confiscated, and unwanted tenants with good contacts in the communist party were housed in their family homes. They were persecuted because of their religious beliefs. It is not a surprise that these women migrants supported the rightist political forces in their new homelands.[36]

How did you survive WWII? The occupation? The Russians when they entered, that is it [what you are asking about – AP]?

(Ilona)[37]

[34] Marina is a Bulgarian language teacher married to an Italian journalist.

[35] Nona is a Bulgarian dancer who got married to an Italian in 1990.

[36] Like Juli, who has a law degree and lives in Italy as a housewife.

[37] In 1964, Ilona got married to her Dutch husband, who was a pastor; she is working as a freelance translator.

The second group of women greeted the Soviet army with enthusiasm and became actively involved in politics, for which they had to leave Hungary in 1956. These women insisted on their leftist ideas, and continued supporting the left. Some women who left after 1989 are still politically active and support the left.

I have that [red – AP] flag there because Valter and I… he created the website for "Liberazione," the journal of the communist party. Well, we are leftist. We are on the left. We think leftist. We are attracted to leftist ideas. I don't even remember but I think we put it there when we came here because there were many demonstrations back then. We participated in all kinds of events. There were many; there were almost one hundred in Rome. Of course we did not attend all of them. We only attended the major ones and then we put this flag out there. We also have a smaller one in handkerchief size, from when the left lost the elections. And many things changed after that and television news programmes cannot be watched any more and Berlusconi set his hands on information. It's terrible! It is simply unbelievable! One cannot poison one's own life with things like these, but they really make us feel bad and we are very much bothered by what Berlusconi is doing. We do not think that it is right. He is not nice obviously, but it is an interesting thing for me to find out who likes Berlusconi. And they are Hungarians. But I am shocked to hear that all of them like him.

(Juli)[38]

Heterotopia: the Home

The overarching theme for the interviews with pre-1989 migrants is the concept of "Home," and its shifting meanings in the interviews. Jewish author Edith Bruck describes in her novels how she is "constantly trying to write this home into existence by describing the search for it".[39] It is necessarily a space of construction for the failed attempt to fulfil the "homing desire". The failure of the desire constructs a new desire, as Anne-Marie Fortier pointed out, "a space that already harbours desires for homeliness".[40] Home is not only a symbol of the failed assimilation but also must be coupled with Avtar Brah's term "homing desires," which means "the desire to feel at home by physically or symbolically (re)constituting spaces which provide some kind of ontological security in the context of migration".[41] Fortier explores the concept of home as a destination rather than an origin, where home might be achieved also through a sense of community.[42] The movie on Edith Bruck's coming home is interesting in the sense that it explores the processes through which she constructs her own sense of self by appealing to her origins. It shows the destination of the desire without any fulfilment. In that sense, all books written by Bruck throughout her life are also about home.

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38 Juli is a Hungarian intellectual who left Hungary in 1985 and got married to an Italian communist.

39 *Biller,* Maxim: Writing history. In: Szombat. Special English Issue: Central European Jews. An overview. (1999) 23f., here 23.

40 *Fortier,* Anne-Marie: 'Coming Home': Queer Migrations and Multiple Evocations of Home. In: European Journal of Cultural Studies 4/4 (2001) 405-424, here 419.

41 *Ibidem* 410.

42 *Ibidem.*

Her position as a narrator in this "transitional space" opens up. Her works, her writing, and her main concern in the interviews are the liminality of multiple belongings. As she described in one of her novels:

Everything had been lost. Only loneliness and the feeling of being an orphan remained. Like Cinderella, who lost both shoes, or to put it differently, the shoes were never meant to fit her. Therefore, it is impossible to recover them.[43]

Her creative work, the play with words, and the language is an opportunity to express taste and personality/individuality, through the possession of space – materially, symbolically, or both. "Home is conceived as something which is actively constructed, through a process which turns the raw materials of a house plus possessions into a home."[44] Bruck does not write in her mother tongue but in Italian, the language she learned from her Italian husband.

In the case of Jewish identity, there is the possible mythical homeland, Israel, as a target of homing desires. In her interview, Edith Bruck underscored the failure of her homing desires. When asked the question, "Feeling at home, what does that mean to you?" she answered:

Feeling at home, I don't know what that means. I feel at home when I go abroad from Italy and the aeroplane lands at last, then I feel I am an Italian from Rome. Rome is mine. The Earth is mine and then I am happy and feel at home.[45]

When she was then asked, "Why just Italy?" she replied:

I feel, maybe this is where my home is. I can hardly believe to come home. So this is home to me. Not home in a nationalistic sense, maybe only because there is this plant and my desk, here a pot of flower, there another one, over there [she pointed to a photo – AP] is my mother-in-law, my parents in the bedroom, so, for me, this is my homeland. I don't know in which sense, I cannot explain. I believe my identity is almost a house number. It exists through objects somehow. I feel strange everywhere. Strange and stranger. I feel at home only here.[46]

Educational deprivation as migration cost

The first group of women migrants could never dream of getting a higher educational degree in communist Hungary due to their religious practice or to political discrimination.

One of the assistant professors started to date. He was unlucky. He wanted to date. He asked me if I was free on Sunday morning, I said no. Why not? Because I was singing in a church choir. I was fired after this.

(Emilia)

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43 *Bruck,* Edith: Római lakás haszonélvezettel [A Flat in Rome to Rent]. Budapest 1995, 113 (Translated from the Hungarian edition by AP).

44 *Finch,* Janet / *Hayes,* Lynn: Inheritance, Death and the Concept of the Home. In: Sociology 28/2 (1994) 417-433, here 418.

45 "Mindent utálok, ami extrém." Interjú Bruck Edithtel. ["I Hate Everything which Is Extreme". Interview with Edith Bruck]. Szombat 7 (2002) 19-21, here 19.

46 *Ibidem* 20.

I wanted to finish university for a long time. In Hungary, I was rejected because of ideological barriers, and by that time [in the Netherlands – AP] I already had three children, either in school or in crèche, and when I decided to apply to the university, I had to pass a comprehensive exam.

(Rózsika)

The second group, however, started their educational degree in the "free world," the most important difference these women experienced was the different status of women in the public sphere. Women as wives and especially mothers were not welcome to work. The difficulty in getting their own university degree officially recognized by the relevant authorities in the host countries and/or complete their education was similar to migrant men. However, the social and cultural context was very different. One of the main achievements of the statist feminism was offering equal educational opportunities for women and building up social welfare services: crèches, day-cares, etc. In migrant situations, women had to fight not only for the institutional validation of their knowledge but to do so in a non-welcoming micro- and macro-environment. The wife of a priest was not expected to work. There was no available child care facility, either in Italy or in the Netherlands, for young women with small children, which made the completion of higher education only illusory. This also forced women to find other ways of educating themselves (evening courses, etc.).

But the problem was that I became pregnant, and in Leuven, in the Catholic university, no mother had ever been a student [...]. [The professor at the university] became angry about what a mother wanted here. I could not sit for the exam, and I was pregnant with my next.

(Emilia)

Meanwhile I gave a birth to a child. And then the whole thing with the university did not materialise.

(Rózsika)

Therefore, I deprived myself from studying... I mentioned to my husband that I wanted to study. He said: "again, what [subject – AP]?"

(Ella)[47]

Defining the other, the host community

We are defining emotions as "self-feelings," following Norman Denzin that "emotions are temporarily embodied self-feelings which arise from emotional social acts persons direct to self or have been directed towards them by others."[48] Additionally, we are following the three levels of interactional definition of "self feelings" by Denzin: "(1) a sense of the feeling in terms of awareness and definition; (2), a sense of the self-feeling the feeling; (3) a revelation of

47 Ella is a pre-1989 migrant living in the Netherlands.

48 *Denzin*, Norman K.: A Note on Emotionality, Self, and Interaction. In: American Journal of Sociology 89/2 (1983) 402-409, here 404.

moral or feeling self through this experience."[49] In the narratives we find mostly the third, and to a lesser extent the second level, but nearly never do we find the first one.

Absolutely two different nations [the Dutch and the Hungarian – AP].

(Emilia)

Yes, the language is different, but we did not speak about that [our feelings – AP], we kept silent. They are different from the Hungarians. They are closed in themselves.

(Magda)

Intimacy, warmth. You cannot have this here.

(Nadya)[50]

I had never been abroad before, especially not to the West. But after that we decided to get married in the end. Then it will become clear what this so-called "Netherlands" looks like.

(Emilia)[51]

I do not think poverty is only material poverty. Poverty, the bounding poverty of your soul, is when you cannot say what is in your heart. What your brain wants. What your heart dictates. That you cannot say yes, God exists. Or you have to deny that one of your uncles or a distant uncle lives abroad, especially in the US. It is not without reason that in 1956, 200,000 Hungarians ran away from Hungary. Poverty is not only material but political; moreover, political poverty is more severe than material.

(Emilia)

I would say it was worst for my mother. I think. She, she never said that to me. They have not written it this way, but I see it from outside, that we, from here and [from over – AP] there – there is an entirely different language and culture. Everything... But for me my life was easier than for her.

(Ella)

The "political poverty" marks the difference between the pre- and post-1989 migrants. The point of reference is communism, so the lives of emigrated daughters are easier than those of their mothers who stayed, which causes the daughters' guilt. The emotional narratives about adaptation are mixed with feelings of guilt for those who were left behind the Iron Curtain.

After 1989, the political migrants might have had the opportunity to go back to Hungary permanently. But the country has changed, and those elements which they preserved – imagined during the years of emigration as nice – do not exist any more.

Nobody [out of the relatives in Hungary – AP] lives. [We have a – AP] house in Italy... it is very difficult to explain that those things. I left there, no matter that I have left them there, there were a lot of good things in there, but they do not exist any more.

(Rózsa)

The ways in which pre- and post-1989 migrant women speak about the host community makes an important difference.

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49 *Ibidem.*

50 Nadya is a Bulgarian ballerina, who got married to an Italian in 1990.

51 Emilia arrived in the Netherlands in 1988. She got married there and is working as a freelance translator.

> We [Hungarians – AP] do know that communism is a nice idea but it cannot work in reality. This is very irritating. And they can't understand the difference between Budapest and Bucharest. Well, unfortunately this is pretty much the case with most of "educated" Western Europe. It is not only me saying this. And these things that I have said. Now I cannot remember anything else that I would find offensive in connection with Hungary and Hungarian people. We are more educated and being a small nation, we know more about them than they do about us.
>
> (Zsuzsa)[52]

The post-1989 migrants narrate their shock through the total ignorance of "the Italian" and "the Dutchman," who they experienced to know nothing about Eastern Europe and have problems reciting the capitals of these countries. Mentioning their ignorance validates a part of the migrant's knowledge, which remained unacknowledged in the migrant situation. Their position – moving freely between countries – offers a different yet critical position in relation to the pre-1989 migrants', who considered their decision to emigrate as final and who never forecasted the collapse of the communist system, the "system of political poverty".

Conclusions

The women migrants leaving their countries with "statist feminist" regimes paid a serious price for their decision. In their new homes, in Italy and the Netherlands, women were not encouraged to live and to act as autonomously as was the official state emancipation policy in their home country, where free educational and employment opportunities for women were the norm rather than the exception. The resulting research underscores the importance of emotions in the process of bordering. The concept of "other" was defined by emotions, as well as stories about communism. The examples of women who left Hungary and Bulgaria before 1989 and who remained invisible in the public discourse did not serve as an example for the women who left after 1989. The missing link of generational communication caused by the "system of political poverty" has far reaching consequences if we analyse the narrative of women who left after 1989.

52 Zsuzsa is a language teacher who used to work as a librarian. She got married in Italy in 1998, gave birth to a child and from that time on, she has stayed at home.